POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF PAUL ADAM'S HISTORICAL NOVELS

BY

GEORGINA HICKS

B.Ed., Southern Illinois Normal University, 1938
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A SUMMARY OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN FRENCH
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The historical novels of Paul Adam comprise a social history of modern France and an extensive commentary on contemporary society. In these works, which form a cycle of seventeen novels entitled *Le Temps et la vie,* can be studied the origin and evolution of the social and political thought of a modern novelist who considered it his duty to interpret the meaning of historical events and to instruct the reader on the individual's responsibility to society. This dissertation, an examination of the origins of Adam's social and political beliefs, was undertaken in an effort to discover the influence of the novelist's opinions upon his literary career.

In *Le Temps et la vie,* subtitled "l'histoire d'un idéal à travers les siècles," Adam has pictured the origins and history of modern France from the Revolution to the present. He proposed to show that contemporary France is the creation of the *Encyclopédistes* and other members of the eighteenth century élite who were inspired by Latin culture and by the Roman concept of justice based on law. Defying the French monarchs who held power through the Germanic doctrine of the divine right of kings, the *philosophes* created the Gallo-Roman ideal by identifying the concept of liberty with the law. Fired by this ideal, the French people revolted and began a crusade which spread the liberal doctrines of republicanism throughout Europe and replaced kings with parliaments elected by the people. From the Continent the Gallo-Roman ideal spread to America and eventually throughout the world.

In seven of the seventeen novels of *Le Temps et la vie,* Adam describes the influence of the Gallo-Roman ideal in seven epochs of French history. The tetralogy, consisting of *La Force* (1899), *L'Enfant d'Austerlitz* (1902), *La Ruse* (1903), and *Au Soleil de juillet* (1903), pictures the conflict between republican and reactionary forces in France from 1800 to 1830. The life of a republican soldier, Bernard Héri-

court, reveals the crusading spirit of the French people during the First Empire. The career of Bernard's son, Omer Héricourt, during the Restoration and the July Revolution pictures conflicting currents of thought of the Restoration era.

The reader meets other members of the Héricourt family, a powerful bourgeois clan whose destiny is identified with the principles of republicanism, in three subsequent novels of *Le Temps et la vie*. Manuel Héricourt, an engineer and industrial entrepreneur, is the hero of *Le Trust* (1911), a study of the French influence in the modern business world. The ancestors of the nineteenth century Héricourts are pictured in *Le Lion d'Arras* (1920), and the fourth generation of the family represents French society in 1870 in the last novel of the series, *Le Culte d'Icare* (1924).

The story of the Héricourts forms the nucleus of the *Temps et la vie* series. To this unit Adam added nine novels composed before and one novel written after the publication of *La Force* in 1899. These works include three novels picturing the Byzantine empire in the eighth, ninth, and twelfth centuries. *Basile et Sophia* (1899) recounts the eventful rise of Basile I from peasant to emperor. With the aid of a kinswoman, Sophia, Basile gained the friendship of Emperor Michel the Drunkard whom he assassinated and replaced as king. *Princesses byzantines* (1893) presents the biographies of two famous Byzantine women, Anne de Comnène and Irène the Athenian. After attempting unsuccessfully to usurp the power of her younger brother, Jean, Anne retired from political life to direct her literary *cénacle* and to write the *Alexiade*, a panegyric of her father, Alexis I, who ruled from 1081 to 1118. In *Irène et les eunuques*, Adam amplifies his sketch of Irène who reigned first as empress and then as regent of Byzantium from 780 to 802. The Byzantine works reveal Adam's skill in evoking the spirit of the ancient Roman civilization which enriched the culture of western, Latin Europe.

The six remaining novels of *Le Temps et la vie* were composed before the appearance of *La Force*. These works reveal that *Le Temps et la vie* is not a carefully composed cycle novel written from detailed outline in the manner of Zola's Rougon-

Macquart series. On the contrary, the early novels represent the formulation of the Gallo-Roman ideal which is first expressed fully in *La Force.*

Soi (1886) and *Les Images sentimentales* (1893) describe the family influences on the formation of the novelist's social and political thought. *Soi,* the first novel of the cycle, is a Goncourtian character study of a *grande dame* of the Second Empire. The novelist's portrait of Marthe Grellou, the subject of the study, bears a close resemblance to the picture of his mother sketched seven years later in *Les Images sentimentales.* Madame Adam, a descendant of the aristocratic Raxi-Flassans family, was a typical fashionable Second Empire lady devoted to society. On the other hand, her husband, Henri Adam, was a member of a powerful bourgeois clan which had extensive agricultural and industrial holdings in Artois. During the Empire the family had contributed two distinguished soldiers to France. Their experiences in the Napoleonic campaigns formed a part of the conservative family tradition. Henri Adam, however, was a staunch republican whose stern disapproval of the Second Empire forced him to resign his position as postmaster to Napoleon III in 1868. He resumed his post only after the fall of Napoleon and died prematurely in 1868. Although Henri Adam's harsh discipline caused frequent, violent quarrels between father and son, Paul eventually realized the sincerity of his father's intentions to make an honest citizen of his son, and the writer retained much of his father's moral sterness.

Thus the family influences on Adam's social and political thought were both conservative and liberal. The novelist's father taught him to believe in the republican ideology, but his republicanism was in itself conservative. Adam admired his soldier ancestors, both of whom served Napoleon's autocratic ambitions and one of whom was decorated by Napoleon and by Charles X. The novelist's aristocratic background produced in him a fear of the people, a tendency to consider the masses a bestial, degraded element. His personal experiences in the political events of the 1880's increased the conservatism of his social and political thought.

The carefree period of Adam's boyhood and youth ended abruptly in 1882 with the loss of a family fortune which had provided the Adams with comfort and luxury for over a century. Forced to work for a living, Paul chose a literary career. He became a journalist until he gained recognition as a writer. His first published literary efforts consisted of a group of essays which appeared in the periodical, *La Revue indépendante* in 1884. His first novel, *Chair molle* (1885) was condemned in court for its excessive naturalism. *Soi* (1886) and *La Glèbe* (1887) are other naturalistic works by the novelist. However, Adam did not remain in the Naturalistic school. In 1886 he joined the Symbolistic reaction and became one of the founders of the new literary school. *Etre* (1888), an evocation of medieval France, ranked him among the leading exponents of Symbolism.

The increasing pressure of contemporary events turned Adam's attention to the political world. In 1889 he became an active supporter of General Boulanger. He joined the *Parti National* as a revolutionary socialist disgusted with the corruption in bourgeois government which the Panama and Wilson scandals had revealed. He became a candidate in Lorraine, directed a party newspaper at Nancy, and served as secretary to Maurice Barrès, who won a seat in the Chamber under the Boulangist banner in 1889. Adam lost the election and resumed his literary career in 1890. His experiences in *Boulangisme* disgusted him with all politicians. He became convinced that the radicals were as self-seeking as the bourgeois conservatives and longed to see both destroyed by anarchism.

The influence of the Boulangist movement on the social and political thought of the novelist is recorded in three works written after 1890. The first of these, *L'Essence de soleil,* is an apology for General Boulanger. The writer portrays the General as a sincere republican who was defeated by a coalition of reactionary bourgeois politicians and omnipotent Jewish financiers. The triumph of these elements defeated a man of the people who would have established a socialistic government in France and would have driven the Jewish bankers from the country. The anti-Semitic tendencies which the no-

velist flaunts in *L'Essence de soleil* became a permanent part of his social thought. In the article, "La Métamorphose de l'esprit français," published in the April, 1911 issue of *La Revue hebdomadaire,* Adam makes essentially the same charges against the Jews. He also accuses the Freemasons as well as the bourgeois politicians of doing their utmost to increase the influence of German Jewish refugees in France.

En Décor (1891), a companion work to *L'Essence de soleil,* is another tirade against the established order of the Third Republic. In this novel the author criticizes the bourgeoisie for its attempts to invade the higher, more aristocratic realms of polite society as well as for its political activities.

In *Le Mystère des foules* (1895), Paul Adam presents another, very different picture of the Boulangist movement. This work is an account of the novelist's political campaign in Lorraine. Adam seems less anti-Semitic in *Le Mystère des foules.* He holds General Boulanger directly responsible for the fall of the *Parti National.* The General's vanity was flattered by the homage which aristocrats paid him; he ended by forgetting his followers and catering to the Royalists. Adam is very bitter with his former hero whom he accuses of spoiling the lives of thousands of his supporters and of deserting France in her hour of need. However, Adam's indictment of Boulanger does not represent his final opinion of this historic figure. In a preface to Francis Laur's *Epoque boulangiste,* written in 1914, Adam defends Boulanger and attributes the failure of the *Parti National* to the Jews, radical republicans, and Freemasons who opposed the popular hero.

Le Mystère des foules also reveals a change in Paul Adam's attitude toward the proletariat. Revealed in *L'Essence de soleil* as the oppressed whom the General would liberate, the working class is portrayed in *Le Mystère des foules* as a treacherous, unpredictable element too selfish to sacrifice for the revolution.

In his complete disillusionment Adam found a new social faith by reverting to the creed of his ancestors. The conclusion of *Le Mystère des foules* indicates a new trend in his

thought—a trend which developed into a permanent social philosophy based on nationalism. The final novel on *Boulangisme* ends with a fictitious war between France and Germany. The conflict is created by a French Jewish financier who, unable to force the German government to buy a certain railroad, influences French politicians to bring Germany to terms by means of force. Despite the sordid circumstances which Adam records as the source of the war, the novelist concludes with a eulogy of the traditions and atavistic influences which war forces new generations to recognize. The theme of the need for sacrifice to the fatherland is reiterated in *La Bataille d'Uhde* (1897), in which Adam reveals the soldier as indifferent to death in battle because he knows that his efforts will help to perpetuate the ideals of his country.

After concluding that ideals of the fatherland are worth dying for, Adam next praises in *Le Temps et la vie* the early French soldiers who died for the ideal of Liberty. *La Force* represents the final phase in the formulation of the author's Gallo-Roman ideal. Hereafter the novels of the cycle follow a definite pattern and contain a consistent philosophy.

Adam's interest in the past was aroused by his dissatisfaction with modern society. He believed that the internal disorders which shook the Third Republic during this period could be traced directly to the institution of the law of universal suffrage which enabled the most mediocre element of society, the majority, to elect its own kind to office. As a result, France was plagued with bourgeois and radical politicians whose anti-militaristic policies weakened the nation, lost the country valuable colonial possessions, and permitted French commercial interests to dwindle. The author believed that the élite minority in France had been ignored in the establishment and administration of the Third Republic. He believed that this group had accomplished all the great achievements which made for human progress and advocated the establishment of a parliamentary system which would make political power an exclusive privilege of the élite. According to the novelist's plan, only those who by some act had proven their fitness to govern would be granted the right of suffrage.

Holders of university degrees, scientists, officers, educators, artists, and writers alone would be qualified to elect one hundred of their associates to the legislature which would be called *La Centurie*. This assembly would be subdivided into five branches whose representatives would control the nation. There would be departments of foreign affairs, politics, and finance, and two divisions devoted to the advancement of the arts and sciences.

In the novels of *Le Temps et la vie* subsequent to *La Bataille d'Uhde* (1897), Adam demonstrated the rôle of the élite in resuscitating and reestablishing the Gallo-Roman ideal in France. In plot, the concluding seven novels of the cycle concern the lives of the Héricourt family which Adam modelled after his own ancestors.

Beginning with *La Force*, Adam portrays the origins of modern France as both idealistic and materialistic. Bernard Héricourt, hero of this novel, represents the French soldier élite whose devotion to the Gallo-Roman ideal helped to spread Latin culture throughout German-dominated Europe. In his brief but heroic career, Bernard Héricourt participated in many of the historic campaigns of the Consulate and the First Empire. In 1804 he was ousted by Napoleon for aiding Moreau, but after the restoration of his commission in the same year, he fought courageously until killed in the battle of Wagram.

Bernard's heroism was to serve as an example to his son, Omer, who was born in 1806. However, the soldier realized before his death that his own family was less idealistic and more realistic than he. His sister, Caroline, who wed Benjamin Cavrois, the heir of another prominent bourgeois family, pursued the practical financial policies by which her father, Augustin, had built the family fortune during the Revolution. She felt no qualms about arming the forces of Napoleon or the monarchs of the Restoration. Her primary concern was obtaining and using the good will of the party in power to her own advantage. Another sister of Bernard, Aurélie, married a repatriated *émigré*, Count Gaëtan de Praxi-Blassans, who was attracted by the Héricourt money. He used his position as

diplomat and friend of Talleyrand to advocate the destruction of republicanism and the restoration of the monarchy.

The influence which these relatives exerted upon Omer Héricourt is told in *L'Enfant d'Austerlitz, La Ruse,* and *Au Soleil de juillet.* With the Restoration, Count Praxi-Blassans placed Omer in a Jesuit school. The fathers attempted to eradicate the republican sentiments which Omer's maternal great-grandfather, a Freemason, and his uncle, Edme Lyrisse, instilled in him during his childhood. Omer's admiration for Edme Lyrisse was inspired by the knowledge that this Napoleonic soldier had served under his father. Throughout his boyhood, Omer was the protégé of first one and then another member of the family. He grew into manhood weak of character and inclined to follow the direction of any relative stronger than himself. As a result, he became a lawyer at Caroline's wish and a member of Edme's secret society which had been formed to overthrow the monarchy. In the July Revolution he fought with the old soldiers who had known Bernard Héricourt, but he deserted the *carbonari* to follow Caroline when he discovered that the bankers and the industrialists had succeeded in perverting the Revolution to benefit themselves. Despite the denunciations of his fellow *carbonari,* Omer became a member of Louis-Phillippe's cabinet and began his political career as a defender of constitutional law.

Thus the last three novels of the tetralogy depict the rise to power of the French bourgeoisie which triumphed in 1830. In this series Adam has shown how important social movements, commenced by idealists, are often misdirected by more practical contemporaries.

Le Trust (1911), a novel of the industrial age, reveals Adam's interest in industrialism and his increasing pessimism over the materialism of the modern era. Manuel Héricourt, the hero, is an associate of an American business man who heads Standard Electric, a trust which expands its holdings throughout America, Europe, and Africa. In his years of contact with the trust, Manuel attempted to measure the influence of this gigantic financial combination on the lives of the people. In Cuba the trust brought civilization to the people and wealth

to the élite which invested in it. In France, Standard Electric's activities were opposed by the peasants who resented the intrusion of the powerful concern into their daily lives. America had been industrialized to the extent that further expansion entailed destruction of other enterprises. Héricourt concluded that the worthwhile activities of Standard Electric in America were nullified by the harmful results of such projects.

The manifold influences of the trust, the constant need for expansion in order to survive and to combat its rivals, convinced the capitalist that no man can control the results of his acts and that each individual must therefore be judged by his intentions rather than by his deeds. Manuel's protégé. Jumillac, performed essentially the same services as did the director. Yet Jumillac sought to gain power, while Manuel himself desired to increase material well-being. Despite their different motives, each individual achieved the same results. Manuel concluded that there were mystic, supernatural forces which determined the course of actions which humans set in motion. He questioned the value of the work in which he had taken such pride and ended with the nihilistic consolation that his works, viewed against the background of time, were worthless, that everything was destined to decay, and that only the supernatural Number forces remained to influence future generations.

Le Trust marks the height of Adam's pessimism about the materialistic age. In the concluding novels of *Le Temps et la vie* the writer continues his task of creating idealistic heroes to represent the French élite in various historical epochs. In *Le Lion d'Arras* (1920), there is Juste-Emile Héricourt, hero of the French Revolution, who vows his descendants to the service of the Gallo-Roman ideal. In *Le Culte d'Icare*, Raoul Héricourt, son of Omer, works to advance knowledge in the field of science. This last novel of *Le Temps et la vie*, published four years after Adam's death in 1920, contains a eulogy of all the Héricourts, symbols of the French élite which built modern France.

In one sense *Le Temps et la vie* is a social history of the French bourgeoisie. Adam has not made a detailed study of

any member of another class. The novelist credits this social group with establishing republicanism, advancing science, and creating the modern industrial world. Yet the portraits of the Héricourts are identical with those of the modern bourgeoisie whom the author condemns in *Le Mystère des foules, L'Essence de soleil,* and *Le Triomphe des médiocres.* In his own age Adam could not reconcile the means by which the bourgeoisie kept power with its record of achievement. He concluded by questioning the value of the entire work of the bourgeois élite.

In four novels representative of the author's *Epoque* series, a group of unrelated portraits of contemporary society, Adam reveals much the same style and trend of thought exhibited in *Le Temps et la vie. Les Coeurs utiles* (1892) is a companion work of those early *Temps et la vie works* in which Adam censured modern politicians. The only new aspect in the *Epoque* novel is the author's portrayal of the intellectuals as corrupt satellites of the financiers and politicians. *Le Serpent noir* (1905) tells the story of a poverty-stricken scientist, Jean Goulven, who becomes the prey of a Nietzschian business agent of a pharmaceutical house. The hero will not compromise with his ruthless friend and dies before he can market a typhus serum which will benefit society. *Le Rail du Sauveur* (1908) is a sketch of American civilization in which Adam emphasizes the American love for money, the growth of industry, and the Yankee susceptibility to religious myths. *Stéphanie* (1913) is a *roman d'analyse* written in the style of Bourget. It tells of a rich bachelor's struggle against his relatives who succeeded in diverting from him his plan to marry out of his class. In this novel, as in *Le Serpent noir,* Adam emphasizes the individual's duty to society and to the family, the smallest segment of society.

The sacrifice of the individual to the family, the fatherland, and the race is Adam's message to his compatriots. If *Le Temps et la vie* is a history of the rise of the French bourgeoisie, it is also an epic of the struggle of the French against their traditional enemy, the Germans. Adam identified modern Germany with all that is oppressive, France with all that

is progressive. *Le Temps et la vie* is replete with glowing descriptions of historic struggles of the French against the Teutons.

Paul Adam's nationalism led him into certain channels of reactionary thought which were to influence the destiny of the European nations in the twentieth century. Although the novelist terms Friedrich Nietzsche a mediocre philosopher, he holds certain opinions on modern society which are similar to those of the German thinker. Both men believe in the élite, the superior race, and the debasing influence of the Jewish people.

Adam's works reflect the spirit of France in a period characterized by the collapse of a century-old imperialistic policy and the reaction against the evolution of the theory of republicanism. Napoleon III's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War brought to a disastrous conclusion the policy of idealistic imperialism to which the French had clung throughout the nineteenth century. Humiliation awakened only stronger nationalistic feelings in the French and led to demands for retaliation and revenge. The extension of the republican doctrine to embrace the concept of the delegation of political power to all Frenchmen was a step which neither Adam nor the most powerful bourgeois elements in France could accept. The conservative forces of fanatical nationalism and reactionary republicanism which influenced France after the Franco-Prussian War were to seize other Continental nations in subsequent decades. Consequently, it is not surprising to see the leaders of nations which became France's greatest enemies preaching Adam's doctrines to their own people. Hitler rose to power on the slogan of race, family, and fatherland which Adam had preached twenty-five years before, and Mussolini sought to realize for the Italians the dream of a Latin empire which the French novelist considered a part of the destiny of France.

Concerned with preaching a strong nationalistic doctrine, Adam never developed certain potentialities which would have made him a better artist. He had the deep interest in many diverse aspects of society which is an invaluable asset to a

social novelist. He had a daring and vivid imagination which he used to evoke stirring scenes of the nation's former glory. But in his self-appointed rôle of extoller of Latin culture he became didactic and redundant. He stereotyped his characters and plots to reveal the efforts of exemplary members of the French élite to preserve Latin tradition and to perpetuate French influence in the modern era.

Adam's literary career was handicapped by the novelist's inability to adjust to his age. He had little faith in modern France and spent too much effort in decrying the present and glorifying the past. Had he been able to create a philosophy which could have protected him from his own epoch, he would have become a more effective writer. Had he succeeded in accepting contemporary France as it was and proceeded to consider means of reforming it, he might have become a great social novelist.

VITA

The author was born Georgina Lockie on January 25, 1918, at Carterville, Illinois. She received her elementary and secondary education in the Carterville public schools. In 1938 she was graduated with honors from the Southern Illinois Normal University with the degree of Bachelor of Education. She received the degree of Master of Arts in French from the University of Illinois in 1939. Her subsequent graduate work has been done at the University of Illinois. She is a member of Pi Delta Phi, French honorary society.